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NOTES ON ONONDAGA DANCES.

THE Onondagas still maintain what Albert Cusick called the Ghost Dance, but which is the annual Dead Feast, differing from the one ten days after death. It is managed by the women, and is held in May or June. The female society, O-kee-weh, makes the appointment and arranges details. The members of this society are termed O-nah-kee-weh. The spirits of their dead relatives, especially those who have died during the year, are supposed to be present throughout the feast. The living guests assemble from 9 to 10 P. M., and dance until sunrise, but have a midnight feast.

First of all there is a speech, and then men sing a chant in 3-4 time, accompanied by a large drum and a gourd rattle. The drum is somewhat like a small churn, with a head stretched across. It may be made of a keg, but was probably once a kettle, as the name, *ka-na-ju-we*, signifies a covered kettle. The first chant begins "Go-yah-ne na wa-ya-hen," etc., and one tune follows another with but a slight variation of the words, which are mostly without meaning, but *wa-ya-hen* refers to women. The women stand in a circle before the singers, keeping time. Then the women sing, and the men are silent; after which the women march around in a circle to the beat of the drum. The great Feather Dance follows, the men taking part in this and some others until midnight, when the feast takes place. At that time tobacco is burned, and the spirits of the dead are implored to give the living good and healthy lives through the year. Dances follow until nearly morning; and among these are the Snake, Fish, Bear, and Raccoon dances. The Raccoon is similar to the Fish Dance, but in the former all face around when the time changes. At the end the leader gives a whoop, and the music ceases.

Towards morning the women again form a circle before the singers, and nearly the same words and tunes follow as at first. Some of the words differ, and mean, "The morning has come; we will now all go home." Then all the women again march around in the council-house, and afterwards out and around it slowly. At this time two men carry the drum while another beats upon it. The women have something in their hands, and as one or another raises her arms the men rush around and try to get what she holds. All then return to the council-house, where a speech is made, and soup is distributed from the big kettle. Having received their portions, all go home. While this is an annual feast, it may be given at other times for the benefit of the sick, being prompted by the spirits of the dead.

Another feast, quite similar, and known as the Night Dance, is

often held at private houses, and is managed by women alone. The forms of the dance are a little different, and there is no midnight feast. This is also for the sick, and has similar tunes. It has some comic features. When the Indian boys hear of a meeting of this kind, they plan how they may steal "the head." At intervals the lights are put out for a few minutes, and then is their chance. One or more chickens are boiled or roasted, and are known as "the head" of the feast. Usually a kettle is placed in the middle of the circle of women, and the chicken is in the soup.

Albert Cusick told me his early experiences at two of these feasts, which will illustrate one prominent feature which I have mentioned. On one occasion the boys saw that there was no kettle in the circle, while there was a cluster of women about the pantry door. They understood the situation, but the door could not be passed. An active lad quietly made his way through the pantry window, found a pan with two roast chickens in it, secured some corn bread and other good things, and got off unobserved. The booty was carried to the green by the council-house, and eaten with a hearty relish ; then the pan, with the bones, was slipped back into the pantry, and the boys, according to the old custom, began to caw, like crows. All seemed safe, however, and the others made fun of them. "You are all frauds. You haven't found the head. We have that safe." So the dances went on. A speech was made at the close. One head was to go to the speaker and the other to the singers.

But when they got there the cupboard was bare,
And so the poor singers had none.

A dance of this kind was held at the house of my old friend, Mary Green, one night. Her home was a good-sized log cabin, fairly furnished, and the feast was well attended. The boys ran around, imitating hungry crows, but with small chance of getting "the head." The circle of women remained unbroken around the stove in the centre of the room, and on the stove was a big kettle of soup, with "the head" in the midst of all. The soup was hot, and the kettle inaccessible. Several tried to crawl through the circle on their hands and knees, but failed. At last one got through in the dark interval, burned his fingers indeed, but put the chicken in a pail and successfully made off. The triumphant crows were soon heard again.

The great medicine is made in a society called Ka-noo-tah, of which I may say more at another time. For ordinary ailments simple remedies are used, but the Onondagas are easily satisfied when told that the white man's remedies may be best for the diseases he has introduced. When a man is bewitched, that is quite another thing. A

Tuscarora once came to Onondaga, who thought he was bewitched, and Abram Island prescribed for him. He took three tender shoots each of the waxberry, choke and wild cherry, and the green osier, and scraped off the bark. This was placed in twelve quarts of hot water, and almost boiled. This was to be used as an emetic for twelve days. On the last day Island came again, carrying away what was last thrown up, but soon returning with a woolly bear caterpillar on a chip. This he had found in the matter, and it was the witch charm. It was placed in a paper bag and hung upon the wall. They were told it would revive and then die again. In a few days there was a rustling in the paper, and the caterpillar was taken out dead, but looking as though soaked in water. After so thorough a cleansing the man got well, of course.

I am promised the old Onondaga songs, both music and words, but my informant that is to be takes his own time. I have said that these songs are mostly meaningless. Some have been translated quite poetically, which the Indians assure me have strictly no meaning, though their associations have almost poetic force, and so the thought has been given rather than the actual interpretation. As long as there is time and sound, the singer often cares little what the words may be, but this is not an invariable rule. I have seen four kinds of rattles, two of which are antique, — the turtle shell and gourd. Some are made of cow's horns, and once only have I seen a very ingenious one of bark. All are alike effective in dances and marches.

Some curious changes have come over the Onondagas of late. Heretofore the Green Corn Dance was held about as soon as green corn was fit for use, but some of the Indians have been giving exhibition dances at various gatherings, and found there was money in it. This year they deferred the feast until the autumnal equinox, having the principal dances on Sunday, September 24, 1893. In this case those who danced did not pay the piper, but the spectators did. As many as could be accommodated were admitted to the council-house, at fifteen cents per head; three dances were given, and then a new party was admitted. Of course this deprived the feast of all religious force, and made it a mere show; nor did it quite satisfy those who saw it.

A few days later the annuity of goods was delivered, a sight not without interest. So many Oneidas now live with the Onondagas that a large part of their annuity is distributed at the same time by the United States agent, Mr. A. W. Ferrin. The cotton cloth for the Oneidas was placed towards the west end of the council-house, and Henry Powliss, or Was-theel-go, "Throwing up pins," checked

off the Oneida list, while two chiefs measured off the cloth. Jaris Pierce, or Jah-dah-dieh, "Sailing Whale," checked the Onondaga list, assisted in the same way. This lot was placed in the centre of the house, against the south door. There was some interpreting, and the scene was quite interesting. The men looked much like any farmers, but the women were quite picturesque.

This mingling of nations is not without many effects. Thus the Oneida salutation, Sa-go-lah, "How do you do?" has quite taken the place of the different and longer Onondaga greeting, and other phrases and words are in common use. The Seneca snow snake, differing in some respects from the Onondaga, is quite as frequently seen.

Until recently I had never seen two women pounding corn in one mortar, but the two pestles rose and fell quite harmoniously. This may be frequent, for two men seized each his double-headed pestle, to be photographed on another occasion. The old pestle and mortar are still quite in favor with most families.

W. M. Beauchamp.